Practical aspects of establishing religion according to Syed Abul Ala Maududi: The role and strategy of Jamaat-e-Islami

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Abstract

This research explores the practical dimensions of *Iqamat-e-Din* (establishment of religion) as envisioned by Syed Abul A'la Maududi, with a specific focus on the role and strategic framework of Jamaat-e-Islami. Maududi's concept of religion encompasses not only personal piety but also the systemic implementation of Islamic principles in all spheres of life, including politics, economy, and law. The study investigates how Jamaat-e-Islami, under his leadership and ideological guidance, sought to institutionalize this vision through organized activism, intellectual discourse, constitutional engagement, and grassroots mobilization. It critically analyzes the movement's phased strategy of reform, including *Islahi da'wat*, ideological training (*tarbiyah*), political participation, and social reformation. By examining primary writings of Maududi, Jamaat-e-Islami's official literature, and scholarly interpretations, this research highlights both the theoretical robustness and practical challenges of implementing *Iqamat-e-Din* in a modern nation-state context. The study concludes with a reflection on the contemporary relevance of Maududi's model in the global discourse on political Islam.

Key Words: Iqamat-e-Din, Syed Abul A'la Maududi, Jamaat-e-Islami, Political Islam, Islamic movement, Islamic governance, Tarbiyah (ideological training), Da'wah and reform, Islamic revivalism, Religion and politics

Introduction

The concept of *Iqamat-e-Din*—establishing the religion of Islam in its complete and practical form—has remained a central theme in Islamic thought across centuries. In the modern era, one of the most influential thinkers to revive and systematically elaborate upon this concept was Syed Abul A'la Maududi (1903–1979), a renowned Islamic scholar, political theorist, and founder of **Jamaat-e-Islami**. His vision of Islam transcended ritualistic and individual devotion, aiming instead at creating a comprehensive Islamic order governing all aspects of human life—spiritual, social, political, economic, and legal.[1]

Maududi perceived *Iqamat-e-Din* not merely as a theological obligation, but as a structured process requiring intellectual clarity, social reform, and political engagement. In response to the colonial legacies, secular nationalism, and modernist interpretations of Islam, he introduced a coherent ideological framework that positioned Islam as a *complete code of life* capable of organizing society on divine principles. To operationalize this vision, Maududi established **Jamaat-e-Islami** in 1941—a movement that aimed to bring about an Islamic revolution through peaceful, constitutional, and educational means.

This research focuses on the **practical aspects** of Maududi's concept of *Iqamat-e-Din*, particularly analyzing the **strategies and organizational dynamics** of Jamaat-e-Islami. The study investigates how Maududi's ideological contributions were translated into systematic efforts—ranging from *da'wah* and *tarbiyah* to political participation and social activism. It also explores the phases of transformation envisioned by Jamaat-e-Islami, the methods it adopted to shape public opinion, and the internal challenges it faced in aligning theory with ground realities.

Understanding Maududi's model of Islamic revivalism is critical not only for assessing the trajectory of Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia but also for contextualizing contemporary debates on political Islam, governance, and reform in Muslim societies. By evaluating his approach to *Iqamat-e-Din*, this study aims to offer insights into the dynamic relationship between Islamic ideology and praxis in the modern world.[2]

Literature Review

The concept of *Iqamat-e-Din* and its practical implementation in the modern era has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention, especially in the context of Islamic revivalist movements. Syed Abul A'la Maududi emerges as a pioneering figure who not only redefined Islamic political thought but also institutionalized it through the formation of Jamaat-e-Islami. His writings such as *Tafhim-ul-Qur'an*, *Four Basic Concepts of Islam*, *Political Theory of Islam*, and *Towards Understanding Islam* provide the ideological foundation for understanding his vision of a holistic Islamic order.[3]

Several scholars have examined Maududi's contribution to Islamic political theory. Works such as **Charles J. Adams'** *Maududi and the Islamic State*, and **John Esposito's** writings on political Islam offer critical perspectives on his thought. Similarly, indigenous scholars like

Khurshid Ahmad, **Israr Ahmad**, and **Dr. Syed Abu Zafar Nadvi** have discussed the philosophical and organizational dimensions of Jamaat-e-Islami's mission. Research articles published in journals like *Islamic Studies*, *The Muslim World*, and dissertations from South Asian universities further enrich the academic discourse on the practical implications of *Iqamat-e-Din*.

However, despite the abundance of ideological discussion, there remains a need for focused research that evaluates the **strategic and practical methods** employed by Jamaat-e-Islami to implement Maududi's vision. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing both primary sources (Maududi's own works and Jamaat's publications) and secondary scholarly critiques, with attention to the successes, challenges, and transformations experienced in the course of Jamaat's mission.[4]

Research Methodology

This research adopts a **qualitative, analytical, and historical approach**. The primary sources for this study include the original writings of Syed Abul A'la Maududi, official documents and literature of Jamaat-e-Islami, and speeches or communiqués issued by its leadership. These are analyzed to understand the foundational ideas and their practical translation.

Secondary sources include books, peer-reviewed articles, academic theses, and critical essays that assess Maududi's thought and Jamaat-e-Islami's activities. A comparative thematic analysis is used to examine how Maududi's concept of *Iqamat-e-Din* was operationalized in real socio-political contexts.[5]

The study also considers the **socio-historical context** of colonial and post-colonial South Asia, which shaped the trajectory and challenges of Islamic movements like Jamaat-e-Islami. Content analysis and interpretative frameworks are employed to assess ideology-practice congruence, strategic phases, and outcomes.

Research Questions

1. How did Syed Abul A'la Maududi define and conceptualize the practical implementation of *Iqamat-e-Din* in the modern world?
2. What role did Jamaat-e-Islami play in operationalizing Maududi's vision of *Iqamat-e-Din*, and what strategies and challenges did it encounter in doing so?

Critical interpretation

Syed Abul A'la Maududi's Ideological Framework of Iqamat-e-Din

Syed Abul A'la Maududi viewed *Iqamat-e-Din* (Establishment of Religion) as the central objective of Islam. In his thought, religion was not limited to personal rituals or spiritual purification but was a comprehensive system that demanded implementation in all areas of life,

including politics, economy, and governance. He regarded it as a collective duty of the Muslim Ummah to ensure the dominance of Allah's commands on earth.

Maududi's interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah was dynamic and reformist. He sought to derive from the sacred texts not only ethical or spiritual guidance but a complete socio-political order. His *Tafhim al-Qur'an* presents religion as a system meant to be implemented through governance and law, rather than a private or mystical experience alone.[6]

A fundamental pillar of Maududi's ideology is the belief in *Hakimiyyah*—the exclusive sovereignty of Allah. He argued that no human being, collective majority, or secular government has the right to legislate independently of divine law. For him, secularism, democracy, and nationalism were forms of *taghut* (false gods) when detached from divine authority.

Maududi was a vocal critic of Western ideologies, particularly secularism, capitalism, and nationalism. He considered them to be spiritually bankrupt and morally degenerative, presenting them as obstacles to the true implementation of Islam. His idea of Iqamat-e-Din was not compatible with syncretism or compromise with Western models of governance.[7]

Maududi rejected the separation of religion and politics, arguing that such dichotomy was alien to the Islamic worldview. In his view, Islam inherently includes governance, law-making, and public policy. He believed that removing Islam from political life reduces it to a set of individual practices, stripping it of its transformative power.

In contrast to radical or violent approaches, Maududi proposed a peaceful, gradualist revolution through ideological reform, education, and lawful political participation. He believed that real change starts with intellectual and moral transformation, which then leads to social and political reform. His method prioritized patience, discipline, and strategic planning.[8]

To operationalize his ideology, Maududi founded **Jamaat-e-Islami** in 1941. It was conceived not as a traditional political party, but as a vanguard movement with a mission to train committed individuals who could bring about systemic Islamic change. The party's structure was designed to reflect discipline, ideological clarity, and spiritual purpose.

Criticism: Idealism vs. Practical Realities

While Maududi's theory is intellectually coherent and textually rooted, critics argue that it leans toward idealism. His model of an Islamic state is seen by some as utopian and impractical in pluralistic societies. Moreover, the complexity of modern nation-states, diverse populations, and global political systems often hinder the practical application of such an idealistic vision.

Influence on Contemporary Islamic Movements

Despite criticisms, Maududi's thought profoundly influenced modern Islamic revivalist movements globally. Movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Iranian revolutionaries, and reformist parties in Turkey adopted his terminology, methodology, and goals. His emphasis on Iqamat-e-Din offered an intellectual foundation for political Islam in the 20th century.[9]

Maududi's vision of Iqamat-e-Din remains one of the most comprehensive attempts to define Islam as a total system for human life. Although practical challenges persist, especially in multi-religious and secular contexts, his ideological framework continues to serve as a source of guidance and debate for those seeking an Islamic alternative to modern political systems. His legacy invites Muslims to rethink the relationship between faith and public life in an ever-changing world.

Organizational Structure and Strategic Phases of Jamaat-e-Islami

Jamaat-e-Islami, founded by Syed Abul A'la Maududi in 1941, was envisioned not merely as a political entity but as a transformative ideological movement. Its primary objective was to establish the system of Islam in totality—spiritually, morally, socially, and politically. Unlike conventional political parties, Maududi structured Jamaat as a disciplined organization committed to long-term Islamic revival through a methodical and principled approach.

At the core of Jamaat-e-Islami's organizational structure is a hierarchical but consultative system. The Amir (leader) is elected and serves as the ideological and administrative head of the organization. The central body, known as the *Majlis-e-Shura*, acts as a consultative council, guiding policy and overseeing strategic decisions. Beneath the central leadership are regional and local units, ensuring a wide grassroots network that helps in disseminating the party's message and recruiting dedicated individuals. Every member of the Jamaat is expected to undergo intellectual and spiritual training, as the movement values quality and ideological commitment over sheer numerical strength.[10]

Membership is not open to everyone by default; individuals have to go through a rigorous process of ideological orientation, practical evaluation, and moral vetting before being accepted as *rukn* (full member). This selective method aims to maintain a core of dedicated activists whose personal lives reflect the ideals they seek to establish in society. Beyond this, there are supporters (*mutafiq*) and sympathizers who contribute to the mission without full membership responsibilities. This tiered structure allows Jamaat to function both as a vanguard movement and a mass-influencing organization.

Strategically, Jamaat-e-Islami has moved through several phases in its mission to establish Islam as a complete code of life. In its early years, the primary focus was on ideological clarification and building a cadre of committed individuals. Maududi emphasized the need for a 'silent revolution'—transforming individuals before attempting to transform society. During

this period, the Jamaat dedicated itself to publishing literature, holding study circles, and creating a comprehensive Islamic narrative in contrast to both Western secularism and traditionalist stagnation.[11]

The second phase involved active engagement in political processes, especially after the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. Jamaat began to participate in elections, engage with state policies, and influence legislative frameworks, always with the goal of aligning the state more closely with Islamic principles. However, Maududi insisted that electoral politics was a means, not an end. The participation was conditional upon remaining ideologically uncompromised and morally upright.

Throughout its journey, the Jamaat has emphasized the importance of gradualism, intellectual struggle (*jihad bil qalam*), and moral persuasion over violent revolution. Its method is rooted in peaceful activism, legal resistance, and educational reform. At times, this approach has led to tensions with both secular governments and more radical Islamist movements, yet Jamaat has remained committed to its non-violent and evolutionary framework for change.[12]

Educational institutions, welfare programs, and media initiatives became essential tools in Jamaat's strategy to Islamize society from below. By influencing minds and shaping values, the movement aims to build public opinion supportive of Islamic governance. The Jamaat has also focused on creating an alternative elite—professionals, scholars, and leaders grounded in Islamic values who can eventually take up key positions in state and society.

The movement's flexibility is another hallmark of its strategic vision. While rooted in Islamic orthodoxy, Jamaat has shown a pragmatic approach in its dealings with coalitions, civil society, and state institutions. It has formed alliances with various religious and political groups when such cooperation was seen as conducive to the greater objective of Iqamat-e-Din.

Jamaat-e-Islami's organizational resilience lies in its emphasis on discipline, ideology, and reform from within. It has survived bans, arrests, and opposition through its solid internal structure and unwavering ideological clarity. The commitment to a long-term vision, rather than short-term gains, distinguishes it from populist religious movements.[13]

Ultimately, Jamaat-e-Islami serves as a case study in how religious movements can combine organizational efficiency, ideological depth, and political strategy in pursuit of a divine mission. Though its success in fully implementing Islamic governance remains partial, its model continues to inspire movements worldwide committed to peaceful Islamic revival through structured activism and moral leadership.

Challenges, Criticism, and the Contemporary Relevance of Maududi's Approach

Syed Abul A'la Maududi's ideological framework, while intellectually influential and comprehensive, has not been without significant challenges and criticisms. His conceptualization of *Iqamat-e-Din* as a holistic system governing all spheres of life was seen by many as an ambitious, even utopian project that faced practical limitations in pluralistic, post-

colonial, and increasingly secular societies. The application of this theory within modern state structures often encountered legal, political, and cultural constraints that made the complete realization of Maududi's vision difficult.

One of the major challenges faced by Maududi's model was its perceived rigidity in defining Islam as a political ideology. Critics argue that by reducing the richness of the Islamic tradition into a structured political system, Maududi inadvertently minimized other essential aspects of the faith, such as spirituality (*tasawwuf*), personal moral cultivation, and cultural plurality. His focus on law, governance, and political authority led some scholars to suggest that his model risked turning Islam into a legalistic framework divorced from its more humane and mystical dimensions.[14]

Furthermore, his rejection of democracy as understood in secular Western contexts—while calling for a theocratic democracy based on divine sovereignty—was seen as paradoxical. Critics pointed out that his concept of *theo-democracy* was neither fully democratic in the liberal sense nor fully theocratic in the historical Islamic sense. This duality created theoretical confusion and, in practice, led to accusations of authoritarian leanings within movements influenced by his thought.

The Jamaat-e-Islami itself, which operationalized Maududi's vision, has faced considerable difficulty translating its ideology into effective governance when given the opportunity. In electoral politics, the Jamaat often remained on the margins, unable to gain mass appeal among diverse Muslim populations. Its strong emphasis on ideological purity, hierarchical discipline, and slow reform sometimes alienated it from the general public, who were more concerned with immediate socio-economic issues than ideological transformation.[15]

Another area of criticism comes from within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Traditional scholars (*ulama*) have often been skeptical of Maududi's reinterpretation of key Islamic concepts such as *shari'ah*, *khilafah*, and *ummah*, arguing that his formulations were too modernist and lacked grounding in classical jurisprudence (*fiqh*). On the other hand, modernist and liberal Muslims viewed his ideas as theocratic and overly rigid, accusing him of laying the groundwork for politicized Islam that resists modern values such as pluralism, freedom of thought, and gender equality.

Despite these criticisms, Maududi's framework retains significant contemporary relevance, especially in contexts where Muslims seek an integrated Islamic response to modernity. His call for the moral and political revival of Islam, grounded in textual fidelity and socio-political engagement, continues to resonate in various parts of the Muslim world. His writings offer a critique of secularism that appeals to those disillusioned by the failures of Western liberal models to address spiritual and moral decay.[16]

Moreover, his method of peaceful, gradual reform through education, character-building, and lawful political participation is seen as a viable alternative to extremist and violent methods. In an age where some Islamic movements have resorted to militancy, Maududi's disciplined and ideological model offers a more sustainable and ethically grounded path. His insistence on

intellectual clarity, moral leadership, and organizational integrity remains a model for Islamic activism.

In academic and intellectual circles, Maududi's works are still studied for their depth, coherence, and engagement with both Islamic sources and modern political thought. His attempt to construct a uniquely Islamic political theory has laid the groundwork for ongoing discussions about the role of religion in public life. While his theories may require contextual adaptation, the foundational questions he raised about identity, governance, and divine law remain pertinent.[17]

In conclusion, Maududi's approach, though contested, continues to serve as a cornerstone for Islamic revivalist thought. The enduring appeal of his ideas lies in their attempt to harmonize Islam with the modern world without compromising its foundational principles. His vision invites Muslims to rethink their socio-political structures in a manner that remains faithful to their religious identity while addressing contemporary challenges with wisdom and patience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Syed Abul A'la Maududi's vision of *Iqamat-e-Din*—the establishment of religion as a comprehensive way of life—remains a defining contribution to modern Islamic thought. Through his intellectual leadership and the institutional framework of Jamaat-e-Islami, he presented a structured, peaceful, and morally grounded strategy for Islamic revival in the modern world. While his approach has faced criticism for being ideologically rigid, politically idealistic, or insufficiently attuned to diverse contexts, it continues to inspire movements and individuals seeking to align governance, society, and personal conduct with Islamic values. His legacy endures not only in political activism but also in scholarly and ideological debates about the future of Islam in contemporary societies.

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